

February 24, 2012

On Tuesday, February 21, 2012, the BOCC passed an ordinance making English the official language of Frederick County Government. I voted with the majority (4-1) in favor of this law. Passage of this law is a minor change from our prior operation under a BOCC Resolution making English the official language of Frederick County Government. The new law affirms that the County will conduct government in the English language. The law also addresses the Board's concern that the County not be required to spend extra time and money to provide translation services for government functions, unless necessary for public safety or health or to comply with other laws or compelling needs. The law is intended to save taxpayers' money and to limit the size and role of government. In addition, the law reaffirms our acknowledgement that language is the primary unifying force in a good community, and that we encourage all residents to learn the English language.

There were a number of vocal opponents to this law who argued that passage of the ordinance would be highly offensive to those who do not speak English. This is certainly not my intent, and the law does nothing to penalize or threaten or ostracize anyone who does not speak English. The law merely memorializes the well-understood practice of conducting our County government in English, the same way it is done on the national, state and municipal levels. There is nothing in the law that needs to be taken as offensive by those who do not speak English. Just as new U. S. citizens must learn English, so all immigrants should learn English if they wish to be full participants in our local, state and national governments.

I understand that some people believe that this new ordinance will deter illegal aliens from coming to Frederick County. Nothing in the language of the law supports this view. I don't think the law will deter illegal aliens from coming here, although if it does I see no problem with this. All of my ancestors were immigrants to America, and those who did not speak English adopted English as their new language. A commitment to learning and using the English language is important in developing friendships and unity in America and in Frederick County. Retaining our individual traditions and cultures is also good, as we are strengthened through our diverse backgrounds and traditions. But embracing the need for all citizens and residents to use ONE common language in our government does not require us to repudiate the value of our diverse traditions and national origins.

My support for the County's English ordinance is a positive statement of a tradition and policy that has been a continual part of our society for over 300 years.